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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2029
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT'S INTERIOR MINISTRY APPROVES ISSUANCE OF
DOCUMENTS TO BAHAI'S

REF: A. CAIRO 453
[B](#). 08 CAIRO 2349
[C](#). 08 CAIRO 699
[D](#). 08 CAIRO 157

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
William R. Stewart for Reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#). KEY POINTS

-- (SBU) On April 14, Egypt's Ministry of the Interior (MOI) published a decree in Egypt's Official Gazette authorizing members of "non-recognized religions" (all other than Islam, Christianity and Judaism) to obtain identification cards with a dash in the mandatory religious identification space.

-- (SBU) While not specifically naming the Baha'is, the decree appears to be focused on their situation and applicable to most Baha'i, not just those involved in recent litigation (ref A).

-- (C) The decree went into effect on April 15, and on April 16 a representative of Baha'is involved in the litigation submitted applications for new identification documents. The MOI accepted the applications - apparently the first time the MOI has done so - but said it would need at least ten days to respond.

[2](#). (C) Comment: News of the issuance of the regulation has been well-received by Egypt's Baha'is, but the real test of the GoE's commitment to resolving this long-standing human rights problem is whether it actually issues the documents. It is positive that the GoE appears to have drafted the regulation to permit the vast majority of Baha'is to obtain new documents. The GoE could have narrowly followed the court decision - which in Egypt's civil law system is not necessarily precedent setting - and limited the new regulation to only the three Bah'ai involved in the litigation. End comment.

The Decree

[3](#). (SBU) On April 14, the MOI published Decree Number 520 of the year 2009 in Egypt's Official Gazette. The decree authorizes MOI civil registry offices to issue national identification cards, with a dash in the religious affiliation space, to members of unrecognized religions (any religion other than Islam, Christianity, and Judaism). While the Baha'is are not named in the decree, it is clearly focused on their situation and a response to the recent court decision affirming the Baha'is' right to such identification documents.

[4](#). (C) The decree is effective April 15. The decree

contemplates the issuance of identification cards to Baha'is broadly, not just to those involved in the recent litigation. The decree requires applicants for identification card to either have a court order, to have previously been issued a hand written card with a dash or blank in the religious affiliation space, or to have a parent who was issued such an identity document. Prior to 2003, Egyptian identification documents were hand written, and issuing authorities exercised considerable flexibility in what they could write - or not write - on documents. With the introduction of automation in 2003, this flexibility was lost. According to local Baha'is and a representative of the Baha'is' international governing body, "ninety percent" of Egypt's Baha'is will be able to satisfy at least one of the conditions for obtaining an identification card with a dash.

15. (C) On April 16, Raouf Hindy, father of two of the Baha'is involved in the litigation, submitted on behalf of his children applications for identification documents. The MOI Civil Registry employees he spoke with accepted the applications for new documents - something the MOI had previously refused to do - and told him the MOI would need at least ten days to respond. Despite this delay, Baha'i community leaders told us that they view the issuance of the regulation as a sign the GoE is committed to resolving the identification card issue, an issue that has caused hardship for Egypt's Baha'i at least since 2003.

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